

## Naples, Italy

Now's the time to visit this vibrant Italian city: the streets are finally litter-free, the sun is shining – and the other tourists haven't yet arrived, says Harriet O'Brien

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### Why go now?

Naples last week looked magnificent, sunshine glinting on the waters of the bay, clear skies allowing views across to Capri, palm trees swaying in gentle breezes. Right now it is warm enough to have an aperitif outdoors without the need for patio heaters, yet you can still enjoy an energetic day exploring this effervescent city on foot without sweltering.



FOTOTECA ENIT/PAOLA GHIROTTI

Panoramic view of Naples, Italy

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What's more, following January's public protests about the city's refuse problem, the centre of Naples is currently reasonably litter-free. So, get there before the main tourist season begins (with the Easter festivities), and you'll have the city's great sights and museums pretty much to yourself.

### Touch down

EasyJet (0871 244 2366; [www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)) flies to Naples from Stansted; British Airways (0870 850 9850; [www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com)) from Gatwick; Air One (00 39 06 4888 0069; [www.flyairone.it](http://www.flyairone.it)) from London City; while BMI (0870 607 0555; [www.flybmi.com](http://www.flybmi.com)) operates a daily service from April to October from Heathrow.

Naples airport is a mere 9km north-east of the city centre. The Alibus airport shuttle leaves at half-hour intervals from outside the arrivals hall, and stops at Piazza Garibaldi (1), where the main railway station is located, on the way to Piazza del Municipio (2). The 20-minute journey costs €3 (£2.30). A taxi to the centre costs around €20 (£15.40).

### Get your bearings

Geographical position goes some way to explaining the bold, risk-taking spirit of Italy's third-largest city: Naples is set between two volcanic areas, to the west steaming Campi Flegrei, to the east Vesuvius – sleeping, but for how much longer? Its principal commercial street is via Toledo, running north from wide and elegant Piazza del Plebiscito (3). South-east is the working port area, while due south is the city's 12th-century fortress, the Castel dell'Ovo (4). West of this is the increasingly glamorous Chiaia quarter, with the quieter, tree-lined neighbourhood of Vomero above it. In the mid-east of the city, colourfully sprawling out from via Toledo, is the Old Town or centro storico.

Naples' two most central tourist offices are at via San Carlo 9 (5) (00 39 081 402394), opposite the Palazzo Reale, and Piazza del Gesu Nuovo (6) (00 39 081 551 2701). Both are open 9.30am-1.30pm and 2.30pm-6.30pm daily (Sundays, morning only; [www.inaples.it](http://www.inaples.it)). Here, and at numerous book and souvenir shops throughout Naples, you can buy an Artecard, which gives free public transport and admission to two sights, and half-price admission to others. The card costs €13 (£10) and is valid for three days.

### Check in

In stately splendour, up by Vomero, the Grand Hotel Parker's (7), at corso Vittorio Emanuele 135 (00 39 081 761 2474; [www.grandhotelparkers.it](http://www.grandhotelparkers.it)), is the city's oldest luxury hotel, having opened in 1870. Suitably romantic, it has 81 bright, spacious bedrooms and offers spectacular views over the Bay of Naples. Doubles from €255 (£196), including breakfast.

Wonderfully positioned right opposite the Castel dell'Ovo is the Royal Continental Hotel (8), at via Partenope 38/44 (00 39 081 245 2068; [www.royalcontinental.it](http://www.royalcontinental.it)). Here you are within walking distance of everything in the centre, there's a rooftop pool, and a sparkling outlook to Capri. Doubles from €258 (£198).

For a cheerful, less formal option, book into the funky Port'Alba 33 (9), at via Port'Alba 33 (00 39 081 5493251; [www.portalba33.it](http://www.portalba33.it)). Doubles at this delightful, three-room B&B cost €140 (£107), including breakfast.

### Take a hike

The classic Naples walk is along Spaccanapoli (literally "split Naples"), the popular name for a narrow thoroughfare dating from Roman times that runs through the heart of the centro storico. The road officially changes name several times, but the exuberance of street life is pretty consistent all the way. Around this scooter-tooting road, and the via dei Tribunali running parallel to the north, is an astonishing number of remarkable churches. All are worth a look, but the very best are highlighted here.

Start the walk at the Piazza del Gesu Nuovo tourist office (6). Behind it is the Basilica di Santa Chiara (10). After a peep at its austere interior, walk around to the back of the church where entrance to lovely cloisters decorated with 18th-century tiles is included in the price of a ticket to the museum containing church treasures (9.30am-5.30pm daily, but Sundays 9.30am-2pm; €5/£3.80).

Continue on to the pretty Piazza S Domenico Maggiore (11), turning left up via S Domenico, then right into via De Sanctis. Just beyond this corner is Cappella Sansevero (12) (which is open 10am-5.40pm daily except Tuesday, Sundays to 1.10pm; €6/£4.60). This opulent chapel is a gem of baroque theatricality, and contains Naples' most famous sculpture: the Veiled Christ (1753) by Giuseppe Sanmartino.

Walk on to via Nilo and turn right back to Spaccanapoli – which by now has officially become via S Baigio dei Librai. Walk on past stores selling glorious Neapolitan kitsch – religious icons with light-up halos; endless figures for tiny nativity scenes, from donkeys to kings – until you reach via del Duomo. Turn left here and then right into via dei Tribunali, and walk back westwards, stopping at one the city's most absorbing sights. Beneath the church of San

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